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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1458
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1325
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 1894
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2418
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1414
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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: OSCE NATIONAL MINORITIES EXPERT
FACES UPHILL EFFORT TO DRUM UP DIALOGUE

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: An OSCE expert on national minorities was in Ashgabat April 16 to try to initiate a dialogue with Turkmen officials on minority education. The government appears to have given the OSCE the cold shoulder on this sensitive subject. Rather than taking the OSCE view that minority-language education promotes inter-ethnic harmony, the Turkmenistan government views anything that emphasizes differences among ethnic groups as a threat to stability and a harbinger of ethnic strife. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) Brendan Moran, Director for the OSCE High Commission on National Minorities, and OSCE Political Adviser Dmitriy Aleshkevich were in Ashgabat April 16-18 to attend the last of three OSCE-sponsored regional education/distance-learning seminars, and were expecting the Turkmen Minister of Education Anaamanov to attend on April 17.

¶4. (SBU) During the course of the seminar, Moran said they hoped to initiate a dialogue with government officials about an OSCE program that promotes the exchange of indigenous-language text books among the states of Central Asia, all of whom have minority ethnic populations from neighboring states. OSCE already has programs underway to promote the teaching of minority languages in the other four Central Asian states. He alleged there were no Uzbek-language textbooks in libraries in heavily Uzbek areas in the northern part of Turkmenistan.

¶5. (SBU) He noted Turkmen officials had removed the term "national minorities" from the seminar agenda, allegedly because they did not want to admit there are ethnic minorities or possible inter-ethnic tensions. The Turkmen government does not currently acknowledge that anyone other than "Turkmen" are citizens of Turkmenistan, although there are ethnic Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Slavs, among others, resident in the country. Moran noted that the Turkmen government had

claimed in a UN children's rights document that it had permitted some schooling in the Kazakh, Uzbek, and Russian languages. The OSCE has been unable to find any evidence of teaching in Uzbek and Kazakh. And the fact that there are no Uzbek-language textbooks would seem to underscore that point.

16. (SBU) Moran said he had been disappointed to learn that the Turkmen government did not agree to a number of official meetings he had hoped to have on April 16, including with Minister Anaamanov, Deputy Foreign Minister Hajiyev, and the Director of the Institute of State and Law. The MFA had not given representatives at the OSCE Center in Ashgabat any reasons for refusing to arrange even a single meeting for him. Part of the reason he had wanted to meet with officials was to begin laying the groundwork for OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Knut Vollebaek's possible visit to Turkmenistan the week of May 19.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: The Turkmen generally are not interested in discussing ethnic minorities. Although OSCE sees bilingual education as a key to ethnic harmony, the Turkmen do not necessarily agree. The government appears to equate official encouragement of minority language education with promoting separation and ethnic strife. They feel more comfortable with emphasizing the "Turkmenness" of all. The fact that this contradicts government recognition of Turkmen communities in other lands and the hosting of an annual World Society of Turkmen celebration is ironic. It also should be noted that the Ministry of Education, as we have often reported, is one of the hardest to deal with and is not especially open to new ideas and new ways of doing things.
END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND